

Haunted

By Anonymous

Some few years ago one of those great national conventions which draw together all ages and conditions of the sovereign people of America was held in Charleston, South Carolina.

Colonel Demarion, one of the State Representatives, had attended that great national convention; and, after an exciting week, was returning home, having a long and difficult journey before him.

A pair of magnificent horses, attached to a light buggy, flew merrily enough over a rough country for a while; but toward evening stormy weather reduced the roads to a dangerous condition, and compelled the Colonel to relinquish his purpose of reaching home that night, and to stop at a small wayside tavern, whose interior, illuminated by blazing wood-fires, spread a glowing halo among the dripping trees as he approached it, and gave promise of warmth and shelter at least.

Drawing up to this modest dwelling, Colonel Demarion saw through its uncurtained windows that there was no lack of company within. Beneath the trees, too, an entanglement of rustic vehicles, giving forth red gleams from every dripping angle, told him that beasts as well as men were cared for. At the open door appeared the form of a man, who, at the sound of wheels, but not seeing in the outside darkness whom he addressed, called out, "'Tain't no earthly use a-stoppin' here."

Caring more for his chattels than for himself, the Colonel paid no further regard to this address than to call loudly for the landlord.

At the tone of authority, the man in outline more civilly announced himself to be the host; yet so far from inviting the traveller to alight, insisted that the house was "as full as it could pack;" but that there was a place a little farther down the road where the gentleman would be certain to find excellent accommodation.

"What stables have you here?" demanded the traveller, giving no more heed to this than to the former announcement; but bidding his servant to alight, and preparing to do so himself.

"Stables!" repeated the baffled host, shading his eyes so as to scrutinize the newcomer, "stables, Cap'n?"

"Yes, *stables*. I want you to take care of my horses; *I* can take care of myself. Some shelter for cattle you must have by the look of these traps," pointing to the wagons. "I don't want my horses to be kept standing out in this storm, you know."

"No, Major. Why no, certn'y; Marion's ain't over a mile, and—"

"Conf—!" muttered the Colonel; "but it's over the *river*, which I don't intend, to ford to-night under any consideration."

So saying, the Colonel leaped to the ground, directing his servant to cover the horses and then get out his valise; while the host, thus defeated, assumed the best grace he could to say that he would see what could be done "for the *horses*."

"I am a soldier, my man, " added the Colonel in a milder tone, as he stamped his cold feet on the porch and shook off the lain from his traveling-gear; "I am used to rough fare and a hard couch: all we want is shelter. A corner of the floor will suffice for me and my rug; a private room I can dispense with at such times as these."

The landlord seemed no less relieved at this assurance than mollified by the explanation of a traveller whom he now saw was of a very different stamp from those who usually frequented the tavern. "For the matter of *stables*, his were newly put up, and first-rate," he said; and "cert'n'y the Gen'ral was welcome to a seat by the fire while 'twas a-storming so fierce."

Colonel Demarion gave orders to his servant regarding the horses, while the landlord, kicking at what seemed to be a bundle of sacking down behind the door, shouted—"Jo! Ho, Jo! Wake up, you sleepy-headed nigger! Be alive, boy, and show this gentleman's horses to the stables." Upon a repetition of which charges a trill, gaunt, dusky figure lifted itself from out of the dark corner, and grew taller and more gaunt as it stretched itself into waking with a grin which was the most visible part of it, by reason of two long rows of ivory gleaming in the red glare. The hard words had fallen as harmless on Jo's ear-drum as the kicks upon his impassive frame. To do Jo's master justice, the kicks were not vicious kicks, and the rough language was but an intimation that dispatch was needed. Very much of the spaniel's nature had Jo; and as he rolled along the passage to fetch a lantern, his mouth expanded into a still broader grin at the honor of attending so stately a gentleman. Quick, like his master, too, was Jo to discriminate between "real gentlefolks" and the "white trash" whose rough-coated, rope-harnessed mules were the general occupants of his stables.

"Splendid pair, sir," said the now conciliating landlord. "Shove some o' them mules out into the shed, Jo (which your horses'll feel more to hum in my new stalls, Gen'ral).

Again cautioning his man Plato not to leave them one moment, Colonel Demarion turned to enter the house.

"You'll find a rough crowd in here, sir," said the host, as he paused on the threshold; "but a good fire, anyhow. 'Tain't many of these loafers as understand this convention business—I presume, Gen'ral, you've attended the convention—they all on 'em *thinks* they does, tho'. Fact most on 'em thinks they'd orter be on the committee theirselves. Good many on 'em is from Char'ston to-day, but is in the same *fix* as yerself, Gen'ral—can't get across the river to-night."

"I see, I see," cried the statesman, with a gesture toward the sitting-room. "Now what have you got in your larder, Mr. Landlord? and send some supper out to my servant; he must make a bed of the carriage-mats to-night."

The landlord introduced his guest into a room filled chiefly with that shiftless and noxious element of Southern society known as "mean whites." Pipes and drinks, and excited arguments, engaged these people as they stood or sat in groups. The host addressed those who were gathered round the log-fire, and they opened a way for the new-comer, some few, with republican freedom, inviting him to be seated, the rest giving one furtive glance, and then, in antipathy born of envy, skulking away.

The furniture of this comfortless apartment consisted of sloppy, much-jagged deal tables, dirty whittled benches, and a few uncouth chairs. The walls were dirty with accumulated tobacco stains, and so moist and filthy was the floor, that the sound only of scraping seats and heavy footsteps told that it was of boards and not bare earth.

Seated with his back toward the majority of the crowd, and shielded by his newspaper, Colonel Demarion sat awhile unobserved; but was presently recognized by a man from his own immediate neighborhood, when the information was quickly whispered about that no less a person than their distinguished Congressman was among them.

This piece of news speedily found its way to the ears of the landlord, to whom Colonel Demarion was known by name only, and forthwith he reappeared to overwhelm the representative of his State with apologies for the uncourteous reception which had been given

him, and to express his now very sincere regrets that the house offered no suitable accommodation for the gentleman. Satisfied as to the safety of his chattels, the Colonel generously dismissed the idea of having anything either to resent or to forgive; and assured the worthy host that he would accept of no exclusive indulgences.

In spite of which the landlord bustled about to bring in a separate table, on which he spread a clean coarse cloth, and a savory supper of broiled ham, hot corncakes, and coffee; every few minutes stopping to renew his apologies, and even appearing to grow confidentially communicative regarding his domestic economies; until the hungry traveller cut him short with "Don't say another word about it, my friend; you have not a spare sleeping-room, and that is enough. Find me a corner—a clean corner"—looking round upon the most unclean corners of that room—"perhaps up-stairs somewhere, and—"

"Ah! *upsta'rs*, Gen'ral. Now, that's jest what I had in my mind to ax you. Fact is, ther' *is* a spar' room upsta'rs, as comfortable a room as the best of folks can wish; but——"

"But it's crammed with sleeping folks, so there's an end of it," cried the senator, thoroughly bored.

"No, sir, ain't no person in it; and ther' ain't no person likely to be in it 'cept 'tis *yerself*, Colonel Demarion. Leastways—"

After a good deal of hesitation and embarrassment, the host, in mysterious whispers, imparted the startling fact that this most desirable sleeping room was *haunted*; that the injury he had sustained in consequence had compelled him to fasten it up altogether; that he had come to be very suspicious of admitting strangers, and had limited his custom of late to what the bar could supply, keeping the matter hushed up in the hope that it might be the sooner forgotten by the neighbors; but that in the case of Colonel Demarion he had now made bold to mention it; "as I can't but think, sir," he urged, "you'd find it prefer'ble to sleepin' on the floor or sittin' up all night along ov these loafers. Fer if 'tis any deceivin' trick got up in the house, maybe they won't try it on, sir, to a gentleman of your reputation."

Colonel Demarion became interested in the landlord's confidences, but could only gather in further explanation that for some time past all travellers who had occupied that room had "made off in the middle of the night, never showin' their faces at the inn again;" that on endeavoring to arrest one or more in their nocturnal flight, they—all more or less terrified—had insisted on escaping without a moment's delay, assigning no other reason than that they had seen a ghost. "Not that folks seem to get much harm by it, Colonel—not by the way they makes off without paying a cent of money!"

Great indeed was the satisfaction evinced by the victim of unpaid bills on the Colonel's declaring that the haunted chamber was the very room for him. "If to be turned out of my bed at midnight is all I have to fear, we will see who comes off master in my case. So, Mr. Landlord, let the chamber be got ready directly, and have a good fire built there at once."

The exultant host hurried away to confide the great news to Jo, and with him to make the necessary preparations. "Come what will, Jo, Colonel Demarion ain't the man to make off without paying down good money for his accommodations."

In reasonable time, Colonel Demarion was beckoned out of the public room, and conducted up-stairs by the landlord, who, after receiving a cheerful "good-night," paused on the landing to hear his guest bolt and bar the door within, and then push a piece of furniture against it. "Ah," murmured the host, as a sort of misgiving came over him, "if a apparishum has a mind to come thar, 'tain't all the bolts and bars in South Carolina as 'll kip'en away."

But the Colonel's precaution of securing his door, as also that of placing his revolvers in readiness, had not the slightest reference to the reputed ghost. Spiritual disturbances of such kind he feared not. Spirits *tangible* were already producing ominous demonstrations in the rooms below, nor was it possible to conjecture what troubles these might evolve. Glad enough to escape from the noisy company, he took a survey of his evil-reputed chamber. The only light was that of the roaring, crackling, blazing wood-fire, and no other was needed. And what storm-benighted traveller, when fierce winds and rains are lashing around his lodging, can withstand the cheering influences of a glorious log-fire? especially if, as in that wooden tenement, that fire be of abundant pine-knots. It rivals the glare of gas and the glow of a furnace; it charms away the mustiness and fustiness of years, and causes all that is dull and dead around to laugh and dance in its bright light.

By the illumination of just such a fire, Colonel Demarion observed that the apartment offered nothing worthier of remark than that the furniture was superior to anything that might be expected in a small wayside tavern. In truth, the landlord had expended a considerable sum in fitting up this, his finest chamber, and had therefore sufficient reason to bemoan its unprofitableness.

Having satisfied himself as to his apparent security, the senator thought no more of spirits palpable or impalpable; but to the far graver issues of the convention his thoughts reverted, it was yet early; he lighted a cigar, and in full appreciation of his retirement, took out his note-book and plunged into the affairs of state. Now and then he was recalled to the circumstances of his situation by the swaggering tread of unsteady feet about the house, or when the boisterous shouts below raged above the outside storm; but even then he only glanced up from his papers to congratulate himself upon his agreeable seclusion.

Thus he sat for above an hour, then he heaped fresh logs upon the hearth, looked again to his revolvers, and retired to rest.

The house-clock was striking twelve as the Colonel awoke. He awoke suddenly from a sound sleep, flashing, as it were, into full consciousness, his mind and memory clear, all his faculties invigorated, his ideas undisturbed, but with a perfect conviction that he was not alone.

He lifted his head. A man was standing a few feet from the bed, and between it and the fire, which was still burning, and burning brightly enough to display every object in the room, and to define the outline of the intruder clearly. His dress also and his features were plainly distinguishable: the dress was a traveling costume, in fashion somewhat out of date; the features wore a mournful and distressed expression—the eyes were fixed upon the Colonel. The right arm hung down, and the hand, partially concealed, might, for aught the Colonel knew, be grasping one of his own revolvers; the left arm was folded against the waist. The man seemed about to advance still closer to the bed, and returned the occupant's gaze with a fixed stare.

"Stand, or I'll fire!" cried the Colonel, taking in all this at a glance, and starting up in his bed, revolver in hand.

The man remained still.

"What is your business here?" demanded the statesman, thinking he was addressing one of the roughs from below.

The man was silent.

"Leave this room, if you value your life," shouted the indignant soldier, pointing his revolver.

The man was motionless.

"RETIRE! or by heaven I'll send a bullet through you!"

But the man moved not an inch.

The Colonel fired. The bullet lodged in the breast of the stranger, but he started not. The soldier leaped to the floor and fired again. The shot entered the heart, pierced the body, and lodged in the wall beyond; and the Colonel beheld the hole where the bullet had entered, and the firelight glimmering through it. And yet the intruder stirred not. Astounded, the Colonel dropped his revolver, and stood face to face before the unmoved man.

“Colonel Demarion,” spake the deep solemn voice of the perforated stranger, “in vain you shoot me—I am dead already.”

The soldier, with all his bravery, gasped, spellbound. The firelight gleamed through the hole in the body, and the eyes of the shooter were riveted there.

“Fear nothing,” spake the mournful presence; “I seek but to divulge my wrongs. Until my death shall be avenged my unquiet spirit lingers here. Listen.”

Speechless, motionless was the statesman; and the mournful apparition thus slowly and distinctly continued:

“Four years ago I travelled with one I trusted. We lodged here. That night my comrade murdered me. He plunged a dagger into my heart while I slept. He covered the wound with a plaster. He feigned to mourn my death. He told the people here I had died of heart complaint; that I had long been ailing. I had gold and treasures. With my treasure secreted beneath his garments he paraded mock grief at my grave. Then he departed. In distant parts he sought to forget his crime; but his stolen gold brought him only the curse of an evil conscience. Rest and peace are not for him. He now prepares to leave his native land forever. Under an assumed name that man is this night in Charleston. In a few hours he will sail for Europe. Colonel Demarion, you must prevent it. Justice and humanity demand that a murderer roam not at large, nor squander more of the wealth that is by right my children’s.”

The spirit paused. To the extraordinary revelation the Colonel had listened in rapt astonishment. He gazed at the presence, at the firelight glimmering through it—through the very place where a human heart would be—and he felt that he was indeed in the presence of a supernatural being. He thought of the landlord’s story; but while earnestly desiring to sift the truth of the mystery, words refused to come to his aid.

“Do you hesitate?” said the mournful spirit. “Will *you* also flee, when my orphan children cry for retribution?” Seeming to anticipate the will of the Colonel, “I await your promise, senator,” he said. “There is no time to lose.”

With a mighty effort, the South Carolinian said, “I promise. What would you have me do?”

In the same terse, solemn manner, the ghostly visitor gave the real and assumed names of the murderer, described his person and dress at the present time, described a certain curious ring he was then wearing, together with other distinguishing characteristics: all being carefully noted down by Colonel Demarion, who, by degrees, recovered his self-possession, and pledged himself to use every endeavor to bring the murderer to justice.

Then, with a portentous wave of the hand, “It is well,” said the apparition. “Not until the spirit of my murderer shall be separated from the mortal clay can *my* spirit rest in peace.” And vanished.

Half-past six in the morning was the appointed time for the steamer to leave Charleston; and the Colonel lost not a moment in preparing to depart. As he hurried down the stairs he encountered the landlord, who—his eyes rolling in terror—made an attempt to speak. Unheeding, except to demand his carriage, the Colonel pushed past him, and effected a quick escape toward the back premises, shouting lustily for “Jo” and “Plato,” and for his carriage to be got ready immediately. A few minutes more, and the bewildered host was recalled to the terrible

truth by the noise of the carriage dashing through the yard and away down the road; and it was some miles nearer Charleston before the unfortunate man ceased to peer after it in the darkness—as if by so doing he could recover damages—and bemoan to Jo the utter ruin of his house and hopes.

Thirty miles of hard driving had to be accomplished in little more than five hours. No great achievement under favorable circumstances; but the horses were only half refreshed from their yesterday's journey, and though the storm was over, the roads were in a worse condition than ever.

Colonel Demarion resolved to be true to his promise; and fired by a curiosity to investigate the extraordinary communication which had been revealed to him, urged on his horses, and reached the wharf at Charleston just as the steamer was being loosed from her moorings.

He hailed her. "Stop her! Business with the captain! STOP HER!"

Her machinery was already in motion; her iron lungs were puffing forth dense clouds of smoke and steam; and as the Colonel shouted—the crowd around, from sheer delight in shouting, echoing his "Stop her! stop her!"—the voices on land were confounded with the voices of the sailors, the rattling of chains, and the haulings of ropes.

Among the passengers standing to wave farewells to their friends on the wharf were some who recognised Colonel Demarion, and drew the captain's attention toward him; and as he continued vehemently to gesticulate, that officer, from his post of observation, demanded the nature of the business which should require the ship's detention. Already the steamer was clear of the wharf. In another minute she might be beyond each of the voice; therefore, failing by gestures and entreaties to convince the captain of the importance of his errand, Colonel Demarion, in desperation, cried at the top of his voice, "A murderer on board! For God's sake, STOP!" He wished to have made this startling declaration in private, but not a moment was to be lost; and the excitement around him was intense.

In the midst of the confusion another cry of "Man overboard!" might have been heard in a distant part of the ship, had not the attention of the crowd been fastened on the Colonel. Such a cry was, however, uttered, offering a still more urgent motive for stopping; amid the steamer being again made fast, Colonel Demarion was received on board.

"Let not a soul leave the vessel!" was his first and prompt suggestion; and the order being issued he drew the captain aside, and concisely explained his grave commission. The captain thereupon conducted him to his private room, and summoned the steward, before whom the details were given, and the description of the murderer was read over. The steward, after considering attentively, seemed inclined to associate the description with that of a passenger whose remarkably dejected appearance had already attracted his observation. In such a grave business it was, however, necessary to proceed with the utmost caution, and the "passenger-book" was produced. Upon reference to its pages, the three gentlemen were totally dismayed by the discovery that the name of this same dejected individual was that under which, according to the apparition, the murderer had engaged his passage.

"I am here to charge that man with murder," said Colonel Demnarion. "He must be arrested."

Horrified as the captain was at this astounding declaration, yet, on account of the singular and unusual mode by which the Colonel had become possessed of the facts, and the impossibility of proving the charge, he hesitated in consenting to the arrest of a passenger. The steward proposed that they should repair to the saloons and deck, and while conversing with one or another of the passengers, mention—as it were casually—in the hearing of the suspected party his own proper

name, and observe the effect produced on him. To this they agreed, and without loss of time joined the passengers, assigning some feasible cause for a short delay of the ship.

The saloon was nearly empty, and while the steward went below, the other two repaired to the deck, where they observed a crowd gathered seaward, apparently watching something over time ship's side.

During the few minutes which had detained the captain in this necessarily hurried business, a boat had been lowered, and some sailors had put off in her to rescue the person who was supposed to have fallen overboard; and it was only now, on joining the crowd, that the captain learned the particulars of the accident. "Who was it?" "What was he like?" they exclaimed simultaneously. That a man had fallen overboard was all that could be ascertained. Some one had seen him run across the deck, looking wildly about him. A splash in the water had soon afterward attracted attention to the spot, and a body had since been seen struggling on the surface. The waves were rough after the storm, and thick with seaweed, and the sailors had as yet missed the body. The two gentlemen took their post among the watchers, and kept their eyes intently upon the waves, and upon the sailors battling against them. Ere long they see the body rise again to the surface. Floated on a powerful wave, they can for the few moments breathlessly scrutinize it. The color of the dress is observed. A face of agony upturned displays a peculiar contour of forehead; the hair, the beard; and now he struggles—an arm is thrown up, and a remarkable ring catches the Colonel's eye. "Great heavens! The whole description tallies!" The sailors pull hard for the spot, the next stroke and they will rescue——

A monster shark is quicker than they. The sea is tinged with blood. The man is no more!

Shocked and silent, Colonel Demarion and the captain quitted the deck and resummoned the steward, who had, but without success, visited the berths and various parts of the ship for the individual in question. Every hole and corner was now, by the captain's order carefully searched, but in vain; and as no further information concerning the missing party could be obtained, and the steward persisted in his statement regarding his general appearance, they proceeded to examine his effects. In these he was identified beyond a doubt. Papers and relics proved not only his guilt but his remorse; remorse which, as the apparition had said, permitted him no peace in his wanderings.

Those startling words, "A murderer on board!" had doubtless struck fresh terror to his heart and, unable to face the accusation, he had thus terminated his wretched existence.

Colonel Demarion revisited the little tavern, and on several occasions occupied the haunted chamber; but never again had he the honor of receiving a midnight commission from a ghostly visitor, and never again had the landlord to bemoan the flight of a non-paying customer.